

Rebecca Filak, Shannon Miner, and Dr. Sriram Sundararajan

Study Abroad Survival Guide: An Analysis and Implementation of Preparing Study Abroad Students

Objectives

- (1) Research universities’ studies on study abroad pre-departure orientations
- (2) Create a guide to better prepare Iowa State University study abroad students
- (3) Co-author and submit a manuscript to an international engineering journal

Background

Engineering International Programs (EIP):

Iowa State University’s (ISU) Engineering International Programs (EIP) strives to provide engineering students with the opportunity to engage in international experiences, such as studying or working abroad. EIP arranges pre-departure orientations for ISU students studying abroad. The goals of the pre-departure orientations are to prepare students for their specific program abroad and to ensure the students receive access to the proper information to have a successful trip abroad, physically, socially, emotionally, and academically.

Table 1. Questionnaire respondents demographics from Stoeckler’s Assessment of Engineering International Programs Site-Specific Orientations. Table provided by Taylor Stoeckler.

% response to survey questions	Gender		Age		Year in School while Studying Abroad					First Time Outside of U.S.	
	Male	Female	18- 20	21- 23	Fr. (1)	So. (2)	Jr. (3)	Sr. (4)	Sr (5+)	Yes	No
	63.2	36.7	41.2	58.8	1.5	47.1	45.6	4.4	1.5	23.5	76.5

Site-Specific Pre-Departure Orientations:

In 2018, Taylor Stoeckler, a Graduate Assistant for EIP, completed an Assessment of Engineering International Programs Site-Specific Orientations to determine whether the EIP was achieving their goal of preparing students to live abroad and succeed academically. Her assessment was distributed to undergraduate students majoring in engineering who had previously studied abroad between Spring 2016 through Spring 2018 (Table 1). These students were asked to complete a questionnaire and to participate in a focus group, aimed at collecting feedback on how the pre-departure orientation could be improved.



Figure 1. Image of UC3M Leganés campus.

Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (UC3M) Guide

Methods:

The process of completing the UC3M guide included evaluating Stoeckler’s findings, researching other universities’ pre-departure programs, creating the electronic UC3M guide, and providing the guide to students accepted to study abroad at UC3M (Figure 2). The goal of the first two steps was to understand the primary issues that students face before they begin their study abroad program and the problems they encounter while abroad.



Figure 2. Process of completing the UC3M guide.

Results:

Based on Stoeckler’s assessment, it was determined that it would be useful if EIP provided additional information for students to reference as needed during the gap between their orientation and their departure date. The reference information was chosen to be provided in the form of a program-specific digital repository with helpful information specific to a location.

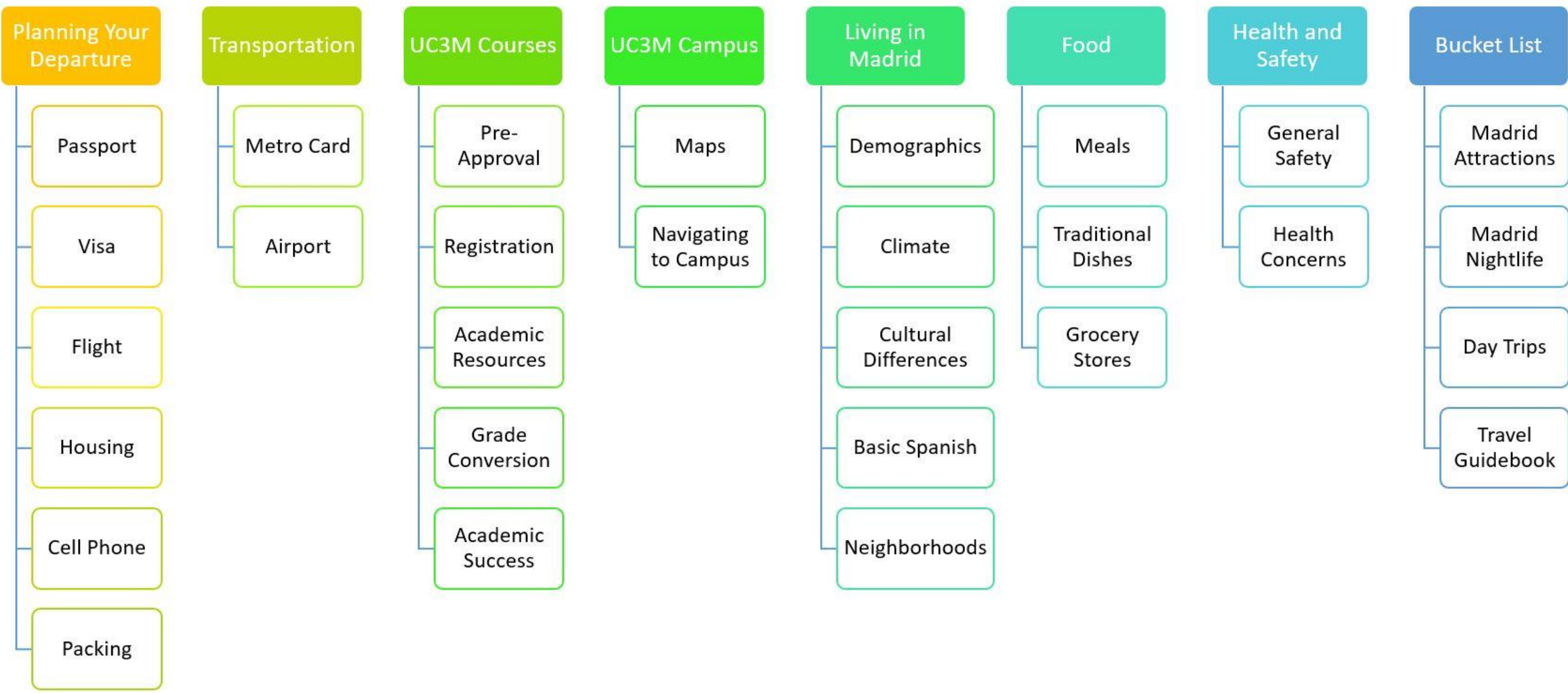
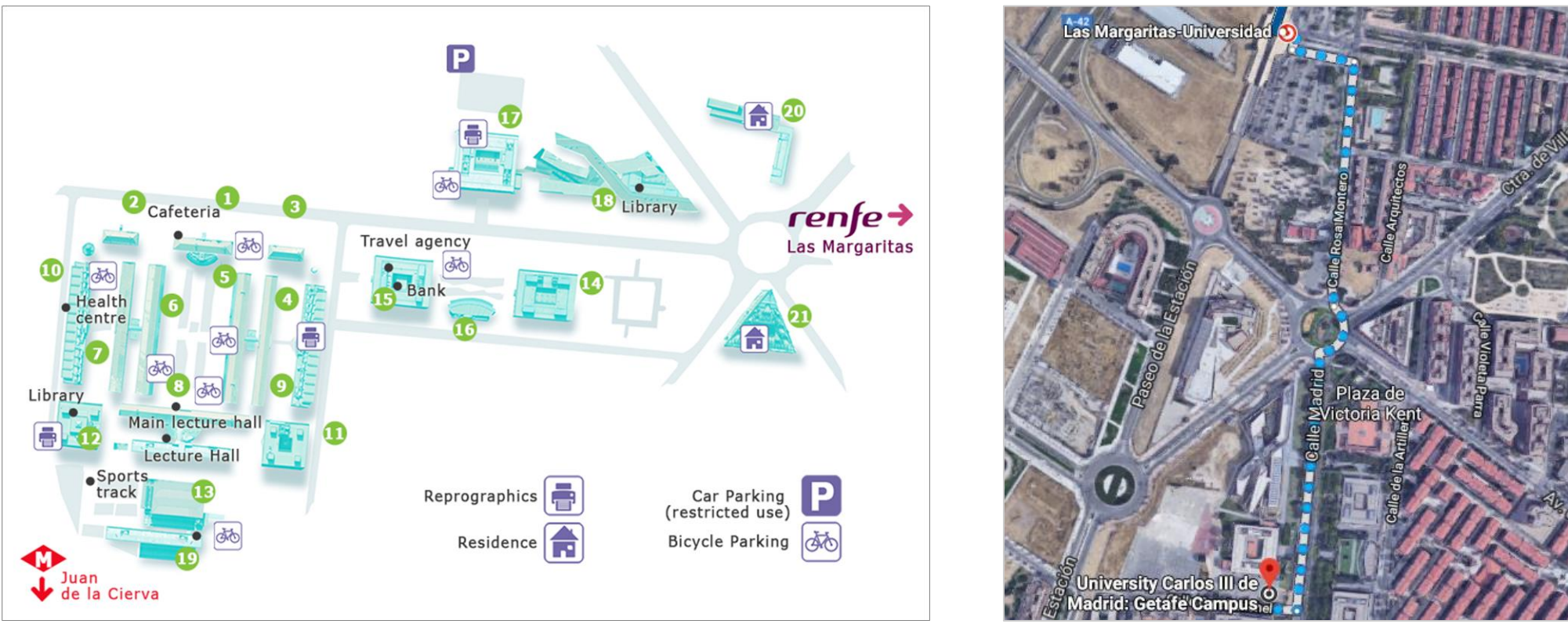


Figure 3. Outline of the UC3M guide.

The goal of the UC3M guide is to better prepare students to study abroad through increased access to additional information. Therefore, the guide was created to make students preparing to study abroad at UC3M feel more comfortable about their departure by providing information on the topics shown in Figure 3. Some examples of information that can be found in the guide are shown in Figures 4, 5, and 6.



Figures 4 and 5. Left: Map of UC3M Getafe campus from the UC3M Campus section of the UC3M guide. Right: Google Maps walking directions from the train station to UC3M Getafe campus from the UC3M Campus section of the UC3M guide.

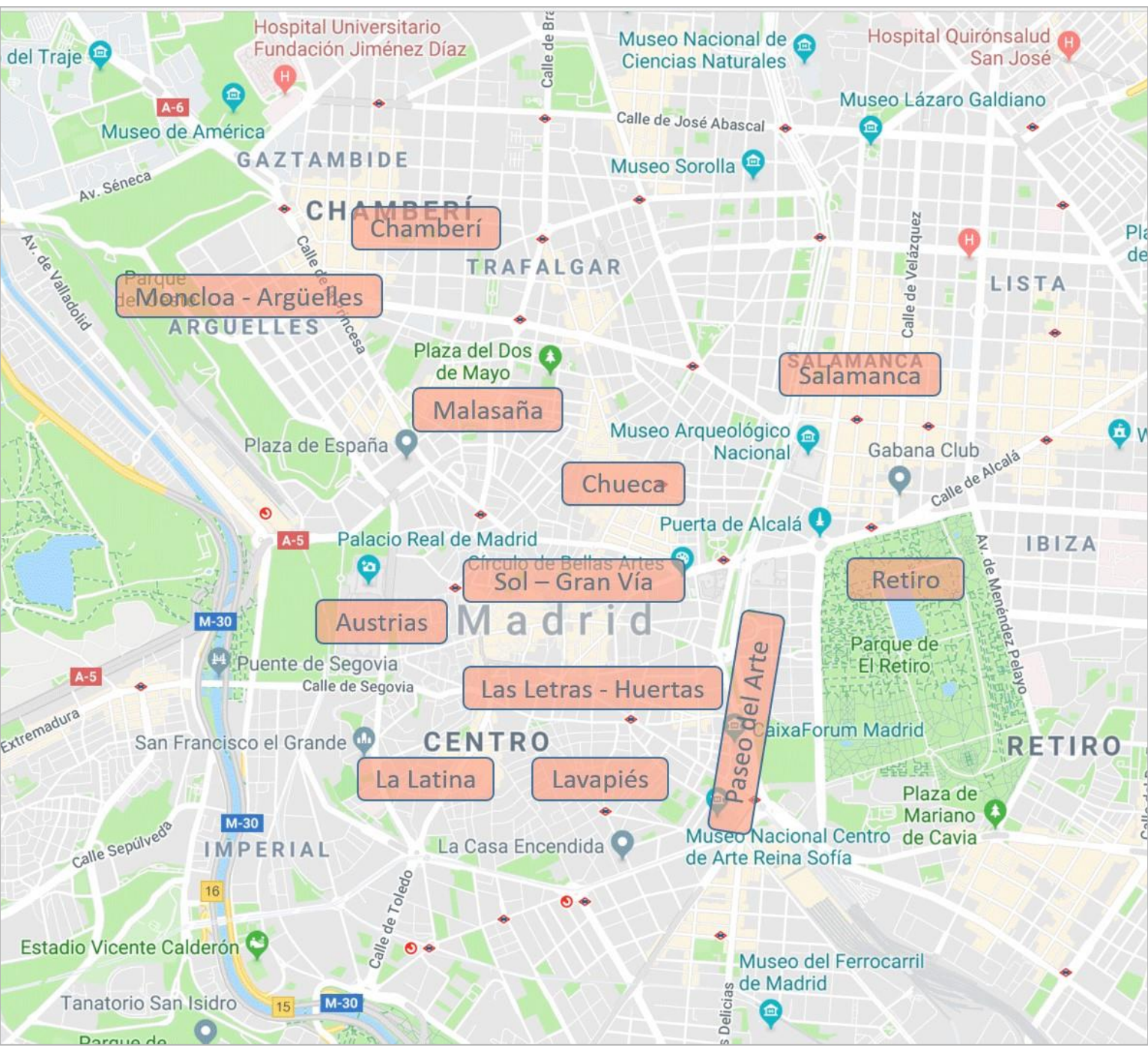


Figure 6. Map of Madrid’s neighborhoods from the Living in Madrid section of the UC3M guide.

Conclusions and Future Directions

- Students accepted to studying abroad at UC3M will have access to the UC3M guide through a shared EIP webpage.
- The UC3M guide will be reviewed and updated each semester by students returning from a semester abroad at UC3M.
- EIP is looking into the creation of similar guides for their other 29 programs.
- The manuscript has been submitted to and is awaiting acceptance from the Journal of International Engineering Education (JIEE).